

# **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Where Is His Coming?**

## **Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching**

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This is Dr. David Mathewson in his teaching on the question, Where Is His Coming? Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching.

So, in the last lecture, we started to examine the Gospels, particularly Jesus' teachings and sayings, as they relate to the issue of the delay of the parousia. And we said there are a number of sayings in the Gospels that seem to indicate that Jesus may have thought that he would return at the end of the world would come in his lifetime.

And we want to look at least some of those. One set of sayings we already looked at, and that is the saying that occurs at the beginning of Jesus's adult ministry in each of the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, to the effect that Jesus says, the time is near and the kingdom of God, or the time is at hand, the kingdom of God is near, so repent for the forgiveness of sins.

We suggested that Jesus' teaching on the nearness of the kingdom did not mean that Jesus thought that the end of the world would take place very soon within his lifetime but that the end-time kingdom prophesied and anticipated in the Old Testament prophets was indeed present. It was indeed a reality, but in inaugurated initial form in advance of the final form. So, Jesus was not teaching the end of the world or the second coming, but he was offering the kingdom in its initial inaugurated form.

It was already present. Men and women could already enter the kingdom of God in advance of its final manifestation in the future, which will come about in the second coming. You'll note that part of this is reflected in all three Gospels, where you find statements about the kingdom of God that appear to suggest it's already present, but other statements that seem like it's future.

Again, the way to account for those is that they're both part of Jesus' teaching that the single end-time kingdom promised in the Old Testament is now arriving in two stages. Number one, in inaugurated initial form in the ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus, and then a second further phase in the second coming of Christ to establish his kingdom over all the earth. So, I suggested to you that those statements at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry and a number of other statements that seem to indicate that the kingdom was already present or it was near are not a failed prediction but instead reflect Jesus' teaching that the end time kingdom from the Old Testament is already inaugurated and men and women could

already enter the reign and rule of God and experience its blessings right now in the present.

But there are other sayings of Jesus that we want to consider. And the next one that we want to stop at, and as I said, there's many that we could look at, but we'll be selective and just, I think, touch on some of the major texts that have been pointed to as indications that Jesus predicted the end and got it wrong or something like that. And one of those is found in Matthew chapter 16 and verse 28.

Matthew 16 and verse 28, you find a similar statement to this in both Mark and Luke. But I will just read the Matthew 16, 28 verse. Matthew 16:28, at the end of a section of Jesus' teaching, Jesus says, truly, I'll back up and read 27, for the son of man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his father, and then he will reward each according to what he has done.

Apparently, it is a reference to the second coming of Christ, though Jesus doesn't say anything about when that's going to take place or whether it's soon or anything like that. But then he does say in verse 28, truly, I tell you, there are some standing here, and Jesus is addressing his disciples, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. And son of man was a favorite designation of Jesus for himself, refers to himself numerous times as a son of man.

And now he tells his followers, his disciples, that he's addressing that some of them would not die before they saw the kingdom of God coming in power and glory. Now, it's tempting to take this as a reference back to verse 27, which is clearly, I think, a reference to the second coming of Christ. And to then conclude, well, Jesus thought that some of his followers would not die before they witnessed the coming of Christ at the end of history, to bring history to a close, to consummate the kingdom, and to bring judgment and salvation and that some would see that.

Obviously, that did not happen. So, what do we conclude? Well, some have concluded, again, that Jesus predicted the end but was very wrong. Jesus thought the end was going to come in his lifetime and some of his disciples' lifetime.

But again, Jesus was mistaken in his prediction. And so, as we saw in the introductory lecture, that this view says Jesus was kind of an apocalyptic preacher. He preached the end of the world, as we see numerous prophecy preachers doing.

And Jesus was wrong, and he died for his belief without seeing the kingdom of God arrive. Another possibility, and again, let me back up, that view, obviously, does not sit comfortably with a view that I'm assuming of the New Testament as the word of God, and Jesus Christ as God himself, and as the one who comes to speak God's truth to his people, seeing Jesus as predicting an end and then being mistaken and in error,

does not fit with that, or with a God who is sovereign and knows all things. There are at least five more views that I think are preferable to that, which would relieve us from having to conclude that Jesus was mistaken and Jesus was wrong.

The last of these is the one that I hold to and think is the most plausible, though all of them have good arguments and are preferable to seeing Jesus as a mistaken apocalyptic preacher. The first view of the remaining five is that this is a reference to Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. So, when Jesus says, truly, I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, the coming in his kingdom would be a reference to his resurrection and his exaltation to heaven.

In fact, if you read some of the rest of the New Testament, such as Acts chapter 2 and even Ephesians 1, the very end of Ephesians 1, in alluding to Psalm chapter 2 and Psalm 110 especially, New Testament authors did see the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ as an entrance into his messianic rule. That at the right hand of the Father, the phrase which comes from Psalm 110, Jesus is now reigning as Davidic King. And that happens, Acts 2 and Ephesians 1 are clear that that happens as a result of his resurrection and exaltation to heaven.

He enters into his messianic reign. I think you see that in Hebrews 1 as well. So, while that's possible, I think it's difficult to conclude that with that phrase, some of you will not taste death.

It appears that most, at least most of the followers standing there, would have been aware of and witnessed either visibly or verbally being privy to Jesus' resurrection and his exaltation, especially when you read Acts chapter 1. I also think it's a little odd to refer to Jesus' resurrection and exaltation as his coming in his kingdom. Although again, the connection with his exaltation and Psalm 110, an entrance into his messianic reign at the right hand of the Father, would maybe support that. But I think the phrase, only some who are standing there, makes it a little difficult to conclude that this event refers to his resurrection and exaltation.

Another possibility, a second possibility that I think again is preferable to seeing Jesus as mistaken, is that this reference to the Son of Man coming in his kingdom is a reference to the Holy Spirit coming upon his followers in Acts chapter 2 and the spread of the gospel. What might support that is it's interesting that Peter quotes Joel in chapter 2 in order to justify and explain what is going on in Acts 2. And quote Joel 2 to show that it is being fulfilled. Joel chapter 2 is a prophecy about the coming day of the Lord when, indeed, the Messiah would rule over all things when God establishes rule over all the earth.

So perhaps by the Holy Spirit coming upon the church in Acts 2 in fulfillment of prophetic text that anticipated a coming kingdom, one could say that the followers of

Jesus did indeed see the kingdom of God coming in power, when a text such as Joel chapter 2 that anticipated a coming day of the Lord, a coming kingdom, was indeed being fulfilled. Again, while that's possible and I think preferable to taking the first view of Jesus being mistaken, I still think it has problems with the idea that only some of you standing here will see this happening. A third possibility is that this refers to the coming of Jesus in AD 70 to judge Jerusalem and to bring about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

We saw that as an explanation for the whole issue of delay, but also particular text. We'll see that as a common explanation for a number of these texts. Again, I'm not sure that this is as clear in this context, at least as I read it.

There's nothing that would point clearly to the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem. But I wonder if Jesus coming into power, especially following verse 27, is the best way to describe the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Perhaps, but I think there might be a slightly better explanation.

A fourth possibility is to combine some of these. A number of scholars take a combination of numbers two and three or even numbers two and four. It's more general that Jesus is not referring to any specific event, but just more generally, the coming of the spirit, the spread of the gospel, the establishment of God's kingdom, and the spread of the gospel in the church.

That is all to be understood as the coming of the son of man in his kingdom. The last view, and the one that I prefer and I think has good textual support, is that verse 28, when Jesus says, truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom that the son of man coming in his kingdom is probably a reference to the transfiguration.

It's interesting all three gospels that have this exact statement; the very next section and very next verse is an account of Jesus' transfiguration, where he goes up in the mountain and is transformed and transfigured before Peter, James, and John. So, contextually, this view has a lot of support because, again, the very next event after this saying is the transfiguration. So, it probably doesn't refer back to verse 27, although in a sense, it does; after telling them that the son of man is going to come with his angels and he will reward each according to what they've done, he'll come in the glory of his father.

It appears now that Jesus says, but there are some that are going to witness the coming of the son of man. Not in its final, ultimate manifestation, but some are going to actually get a glimpse of that, sort of a preview of that, in the form of the transfiguration. That's exactly what happens in Matthew 17 and in all three gospels in the very next event after this saying.

It's interesting that the transfiguration account is shot through with Old Testament language of the kingdom of God. A lot of it, I think, depends on Daniel chapter 7, a picture of the son of man coming in his glory, coming in his kingdom. Daniel 7 plays a role in what's going on in this vision of Jesus Christ being transfigured and transformed, the son of man, before his people.

Certainly, only some did see it. There were only some of those standing there in chapter 16 that did see it, and that only Peter, James, and John did get to witness the transfiguration. So once more, I don't think verse 28 of chapter 16 of Matthew and the parallels in Luke and Mark are even predictions of the future second coming of Christ.

I think they refer to a closer event, the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. If you don't think that's the right view, certainly there are other better options than saying that Jesus failed in his prediction. It could refer to the 70 AD event.

It could refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit in Luke or Acts. There are a couple of things it could refer to. But again, I prefer the transfiguration contextually and also its relationship to Daniel 7 and other texts in the Old Testament.

It does seem to make clear that this is a snapshot of a preview of Jesus coming in his final eschatological glory, and only a few did get to witness that in the form of transfiguration. The next verse that I want to point your attention to is unique to the Gospel of Matthew, another text that has often been taken to suggest that Jesus predicted the end and was mistaken. That text is Matthew 10 and verse 23.

This is in the context of a broader context of Jesus commissioning his 12 disciples to go out on a mission. And verse 23 is the verse we want to focus on. And Jesus says, verse 23, when they persecute you in one town, flee to the other.

And here are the words we want to focus on. For truly I tell you, you will not have gone through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Now, again, Jesus speaking to his 12 disciples seems to suggest that Jesus thought before they ever got done with their mission to Israel that the Son of Man was going to come.

Obviously, Jesus didn't come back in his disciples' lifetime or in his lifetime. And again, 2,000 years later, we are nearly here. Was Jesus mistaken? Was Jesus wrong? Indeed, that's the conclusion of Albert Schweitzer.

We mentioned him in the introductory video, a well-known theologian who concluded Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher. He preached the end of the world, but he was mistaken. Jesus was wrong in predicting that he would come within the lifetime of his disciples.

That was Schweitzer's and some others' view of Matthew 10:23. Another view is that this is a reference to Jesus' resurrection. When he says, you will not finish going throughout all the towns of Israel until before the Son of Man comes. That's a reference, some say, to his resurrection.

That is, until Jesus' resurrection, the disciples were mainly to evangelize Jews in the nation of Israel. After his resurrection, for example, we have the Great Commission. If you remember, at the end of Matthew 28, Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples not of Israel but of all nations.

So, some would conclude they will not finish going through all the towns of Israel. They will not finish their evangelism to Israel before the resurrection of the Son of Man, at which time the gospel was to spread, and their mission was to spread to include Gentiles and all nations, as reflected in the Great Commission. While this is just possible, I think the coming of the Son of Man at the very end of verse 23, that reference before the Son of Man comes, is a rather odd way to refer to Jesus' resurrection.

I don't think you find that anywhere else. I'm not sure that that is the way that we should read this. Another possibility that we've already seen is that, for a couple of other verses and that we'll continue to see, this is a reference to Jesus coming in AD 70 to bring judgment upon Jerusalem.

And T. Wright and others hold a position like that. Again, this is possible and certainly preferable to taking the view that Jesus predicted his coming and his return and was mistaken. But I would suggest a view that probably better fits the text than that.

That is, this refers to the parousia or second coming of Christ. So, in that sense, Schweitzer's right. Jesus is predicting his second coming and his return, but it's not necessary to see him as mistaken.

I think the way to look at this is to realize that Jesus' commission to his disciples can be broken into two sections in Matthew chapter 10. One of them is found in the first 15 verses. The first 15 verses of Matthew chapter 10 reveal a very short-term mission.

And when you read these verses, especially starting with verse 5 all the way through 15, this reflects a more narrow focus and a more short-term mission. When you get to verse 16 and through the rest of the chapter, the perspective broadens out, and it's no longer narrowly focused, and it appears to be a much wider and longer-term mission. Because now you have them in front of the courts.

You have the disciples in front of the courts. You have them in front of magistrates and kings. You will be brought before governors and kings in verse 18.

You'll be persecuted. And now you get a picture of something that seems to have branched out or broadened out in perspective much more than the first 15 verses. In other words, it appears that verses 17 to the end of the chapter, or 16 to the end of the chapter, depict a mission that would be ongoing until Christ returned.

One that was even broader in scope and went beyond what is described in the first 15 verses. And so, what Jesus is envisioning here is an ongoing mission to Israel until he returns without telling you when he's going to return or without telling you how soon it is. It's an ongoing mission to Israel that will exist alongside of the mission to the disciples.

It's almost a command to them. It's almost meant to instill urgency for this mission in view of the fact that the Son of Man is one day going to come. Now, this picture of this widespread broader-term mission, all it does is simply demonstrates that the mission is to expand just beyond the narrow focus in the first 15 verses and beyond Israel.

It doesn't tell you how long it will go on. Certainly, it doesn't envision 2,000 years. But neither does it envision an immediate return of Christ within the lifetime of the disciples.

It simply reminds them that alongside of their mission to the Gentiles, there will always be an unfinished mission to Israel that the disciples and their followers must engage in. And so, this verse is more of an encouragement to continue that and an urgency to continue that rather than a prediction of the end or how close the end is. It may also again reflect Matthew 28:18-20, the command to make disciples of all nations.

Now, we see that here in this broader mission but with a reminder of the still ongoing and unfulfilled mission to Israel that must continue until the Son of Man returns. Again, we have to remember that Jesus was teaching us that the kingdom had already been inaugurated. The end times were already pressing in on them.

The kingdom had already begun, so they were simply waiting for its consummation. So, this brings about an urgency in their evangelism and in their mission. So, once again, I don't think it is necessary or legitimate to draw on this text and conclude, therefore, that Jesus was mistaken.

He was wrong in predicting the end of the world because, yes, he is referring to the second coming in Matthew 10-23, but he's not predicting when it will occur. And again, it occurs in the context of a broader mission that Jesus certainly sees as extending for some time. Jesus isn't telling us it's going to be 2,000 years, but neither

is he saying that he's going to come back immediately within their lifetime, and then he was mistaken.

No, he's simply reminding them of the urgency of the mission and the unfulfilled nature of the mission to Israel that Jesus' followers, present and future, must always engage in and be involved in. The last text or set of texts that I want to discuss, and there are others we could talk about, but this section, the larger section, has two or three important passages that we need to consider in relationship to the theme of the delay of the parousia, and that is Jesus' most extensive teaching on his coming, a section that's often labeled Jesus' eschatological discourse or his Olivet Discourse because he taught it on the Mount of Olives. That is a sermon or teaching that is found in Matthew 24 and 25, the most extensive version, and then Mark 13 and Luke 21, Jesus' Olivet Discourse.

We will focus on Matthew 24 because it is the fullest account of Jesus' teaching and has a couple of things in there that are not in the other synoptic Gospels. The first verses or sayings of Jesus that I want to focus on are found in chapter 24, I'm sorry, 24 of Matthew and verse 34. Actually, we'll start with verse 29, and we'll talk a bit about the entire section 24 and 25 as well so we can make more sense of the individual sayings, but verse 29, immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shed its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Those latter words seem to refer to the second coming of Christ at the end of history coming in glory and in his kingdom to judge, but Matthew says it will occur immediately after the distress of those days.

What is the distress of those days? We'll have to talk about that verse. The other one is verse 34: truly I tell you, this is still Matthew 24, truly I tell you, this generation, which I think this generation clearly refers to the people Jesus is talking to, his contemporaries, his followers, his disciples, those hearing him preach, that's this generation. So those people alive hearing Jesus teach, he says this generation, you who are listening, you who are alive, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

What are these things that are going to take place that Jesus is convinced that his listeners will see before they pass away before they die? Many are convinced again that with these two verses, Jesus was predicting all these things, referring to a second coming. Jesus was predicting the end of the world, but he was mistaken. Well, let's back up and look a little bit at chapters 24 and 25 as a whole, especially 24.

24 begins with Jesus' disciples observing the temple, a rather impressive structure, the temple in Jerusalem that Herod had built. They look at this and marvel at the building and the structure, and then Jesus immediately predicts its destruction. He says in verse 24, verse 1, his disciples came up and called his attention to its buildings, the temple.



And he replied to them, do you see all these things? Truly, I tell you, not one stone of this temple and its structure will be left on another that will not be thrown down. So, Jesus seems to be predicting the destruction of the temple. And then verse 3 says, while he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and said, tell us, when will these things happen? That is, what are these things? The destruction of the temple.

Jesus just told him that the temple would be destroyed. When will these things happen? And the second part of the question is, what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? So, their question is twofold, and they probably related the two. Number one, when is the temple going to be destroyed? Jesus, you just told us it was going to be.

And then they would have thought in terms of, then that must mean that the coming of Christ is right around the corner, the end of the age, the future final coming of Christ in his glory and power to set up his kingdom. When will that take place? What will be the signs that the end of the age has arrived? I take it, then, that Jesus is going to answer both of these questions. Some have said, well, Jesus answers one and puts the other one-off or something else.

So, I take it Jesus is going to answer both of them. And throughout the rest of 24 and 25, I think the key is understanding when and how Jesus answers both these questions. Now, there's a way to; there are different ways to interpret this entire section of Matthew 24.

One of them, again, is to say that all of this took place in AD 70, the destruction of Jerusalem. Again, N.T. Wright and others hold such a position. That is, the entirety of chapter 24 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Even chapter 24 and verses 29 and 32, when say, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shed its light, the stars will fall from the sky, the powers of the heaven will be shaken, then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. The Son of Man will be coming on the clouds in power and great glory. Doesn't that sound like the second coming of Christ? Well, some would take this and say that's simply kind of an apocalyptic, symbolic way of simply describing Jesus coming in judgment on Jerusalem.

It's not referring to a literal coming of Christ in the clouds that we can look up in the sky and see. And N.T. Wright and others would say, yes, Jesus is going to return to his second coming in the future. But they're just saying that's not what this is referring to.

They would suggest that the whole of chapter 24 refers to the second coming, or the coming of Christ in AD 70, to destroy Jerusalem. Even that language of the sky being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the Son of Man coming on the clouds in power and great glory is a symbolic way of describing Christ coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. Another option is to refer to this whole section as future.

The view that we talked about in the last lecture of classical dispensationalism often takes this view. This whole chapter refers to a future when the temple will be rebuilt one day in Jerusalem, and then it will be destroyed by the Antichrist. So, the whole thing is the future, which is kind of the opposite of the AD 70 view that says it's all first century.

The future view says, no, the whole chapter is future. A third approach that I prefer is that there are elements of both throughout the chapter. Chapter 24, verses 4 through 22, probably refer to events that characterize the first century, but that will continue to characterize history until Christ comes back.

Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and then one special horrific event in verses 15 through 22, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. So, what that means is chapters 24:4, and 22 refer to events that were already happening in the first century that Jesus' disciples would witness and experience. All you have to do is read the book of Acts and see what they did. Search history and see that it did happen.

And one specific terrible event was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Those events would characterize the whole period of history until Jesus came back. Again, Jesus doesn't say whether that'll go on for 100 years, 2,000 years, or 5,000 years.

He doesn't say. He's simply telling his disciples, here's what will characterize the age of the church leading up to the second coming of Christ. So, in that way, the first 22 verses of chapter 24 answer the first question.

When will these things happen? That is the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus tells them. But then, starting at verse 29, immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will shed its light, the stars fall from the sky, the powers of the heavens will be shaken, then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky.

And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn. They'll see the Son of Man on the clouds, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And then he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet.

They will gather the elect from the four winds from the end of the sky to the other. I think those verses then refer to the second part of Jesus, of the disciples' question.

When will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age? This is the second coming of Christ.

Here's the coming of Christ at the very end of history to bring it to a close. I know some disagree with that, and again, the 70 AD view could very well be right. But either of those would be preferable to taking this as a failed prediction by Jesus.

But having put things in that context, again, verses 4 through 22 refer to events that will take place throughout the entire church age: wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, the love of many growing cold. And then amongst those events will be one particular terrible event, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

That was the first question the disciples asked. Then, verses 29 through 32 finally get you to, and 31 get you to the second coming of Christ, the second part of the disciples' question. Now, having said that what do we do with some of these sayings? Chapter 24 and verse 34.

Now, let's see, I'm sorry, yeah, verse 34. Truly, I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place. The key is understanding what all things will take place, which Jesus is convinced this generation will see before they pass away.

And again, I'm convinced this generation does not mean the Jewish nation or whoever is going to be alive someday in the tribulation period in the future. There's no other way to take this generation than Jesus' contemporaries, the people he's speaking to, those who are listening to him, and his disciples. That's the this generation.

But Jesus tells them they won't take or pass away until they see all these things. But what are all these things? Well, some take it as referring to the immediately previous verses. The sun will be darkened.

The moon will not shed its light. The sign of the son of man will appear. The earth will mourn.

They'll see the son of man coming on clouds and the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He'll send out his angels with a loud trumpet, which I think refers to the second coming of Christ. And some would say that's what these things, all these things are.

And so, if that's true, then Jesus is saying you, this generation, the people I'm addressing, you're not going to pass away until you see my second coming. If that's the case, again, Jesus was mistaken, and Jesus was wrong. Another view is the 70 AD view that we've been discussing.

They would say the same thing. All these things refer back to verses 29 through 31. The coming on the clouds of great glory, the angels gathering, the elect, the sky darkened, the powers of heaven darkened, the stars of the sky falling.

But again, they interpret that not as a reference to the second coming but as a reference to Jesus coming on judgment in AD 70 upon Jerusalem. In that way, it is true that this generation did not pass away before they saw all these things. If all these things in 29 and 31 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and indeed those standing there, Jesus' disciples and contemporaries did see that horrific event.

But what if verses 29 through 31 do refer to the second coming of Christ? As I think it might. Was Jesus wrong? I think the way to understand this is that all these things in verse 34 refer back to these things in verse 33. So, look at the verse before.

In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that he is near at the door. That is the son of man is near at the door. Again, what are all these things? In my opinion, I think that all these things do not refer back to verses 29 through 31.

For this reason, verse 33 wouldn't make sense because it ends by saying, know that he is near. He's at the door. It wouldn't make sense to say, when you see all these things, the coming of Christ, know that he's at the door.

That wouldn't make sense because he's already come. If all these things in verse 33 refer back to 29 through 31, which is a reference to the second coming, it wouldn't make sense to say when you see the second coming occur, know that the second coming is near. That wouldn't make sense.

So, all these things in 33 and 34 probably refer back to all those events in verses 4 through 22. The wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines that will characterize the whole age of church history, including in the midst of that, including one horrific event, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. And indeed, Jesus' followers did see these things happen.

They did see wars and rumors of wars and rumors of wars. They did experience famines and earthquakes. And they did see the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Jesus' point is simply that when you see all these things happen, know that the Son of Man is near. Know that he's right at the door. Jesus doesn't say whenever you see these things happen, I'm coming back right away immediately.

He just says that once these things happen, Jesus can come back at any time. Once the disciples see all these things take place, Jesus could return at any time. It's not a prediction that he must or he necessarily will.

It's simply a prediction that Jesus can now return once all these things have happened. So, to put this all together, yes, Jesus' followers did see these things. This generation that Jesus was addressing did see all these things.

Not the second coming of Christ, but they saw the wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes and famine and the love of many growing cold. They saw the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Once all these things take place, Jesus' return can take place at any time.

But the text again stops short of predicting when that will take place or that he has to take place, or that he must return. Jesus doesn't tell us exactly when he'll return. It's interesting that the rest of Matthew 24 and 25 revert to a series of parables that all have one theme, which is vigilance or living responsibly and living holy lives in light of the second coming.

So again, Jesus' teaching is not to give his disciples information to calculate how close to the end they are. Jesus isn't giving them a series of signs to predict when he's going to come back. He's trying to instill in his disciples the need to live life responsibly and to live holy lives in the present in light of the fact that Jesus could come back at any time.

When they see these things happen, don't use it to predict when Christ is going to come back. But when you see these things happen, know that Christ is at the door and could come back at any time. And therefore, live out your life responsibly as God's people.

It's intriguing, too, that often today, we think of these signs, and again, when you look at this text, Jesus is not saying, here are some signs so you'll know when I'm coming back. He does just the opposite. In 4 through 22, at least two or three times, Jesus when says you'll see wars and rumors of wars and famines and earthquakes, and then he ends up by saying, but the end is not yet.

That is, these signs do not tell you that the end is here. Don't be deceived. In fact, before that statement, in chapter 24, before that statement, immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened. Before that, he has this section starting at verse 23.

If anyone tells you, see, there's the Messiah over here; do not believe it. In other words, Jesus' whole point is that you shouldn't be deceived when you see these things. Wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, even the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, don't be alarmed and deceived.

The end is not yet. When Jesus returns, he says, you won't miss it. Verses 29 through 31, you will not miss it when Jesus returns.

So again, in summary, at least for verse 34, Jesus is not predicting an end that never came. He's simply telling his followers, you, this generation, you will see all these things take place. These things being the wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

And then, when you see those, know that I am standing at the door. Know that Jesus is coming right around the corner. How close or how far? Jesus doesn't say.

The next statement that I want to look at is the one found in verse 29 that we have already read: Matthew 24, 29. Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light.

The stars will fall from the sky. Powers of heaven will be shaken. The sign of the Son of Man will be there.

He'll come in the clouds in great power and glory. The angels with the trumpet will come. I think a reference to the second coming of Christ.

But Jesus seems to say the second coming of Christ will come immediately after the distress of those days. What is the distress of those days? Well, some have suggested the distress of those days is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, which Jesus described in verses 15 through 22 of Matthew 24. If that's the case, and if Matthew 24, 29 is referring to the second coming of Christ, then Jesus got it wrong because Jesus' second coming did not happen right after 70 AD in the destruction of Jerusalem.

I think, though, that in verse 29, all these things, or the distress of those days, most likely again refer back to all the events in verses 4 through 22—that whole period of distress. As I've mentioned several times, that period with wars, rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, that whole period of time is a time of distress.

After that, Jesus will return. The Son of Man will return on the clouds in power and great glory. But again, the problem is Jesus doesn't tell us how long that period is going to last.

He doesn't say whether it's five years, 10 years or 100 years or 2,000 years, or much longer. That's not his concern. Instead, again, it's to instill vigilance and responsible living in his followers.

But again, if verse 29, the distress of those days is not the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but is that event and all the other events that characterize the entire period of church history, then once more, Jesus is not predicting an end that failed to come about. He's not predicting an end that was going to come about in the first century right after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but then it never materialized, and Jesus was mistaken. Instead, Jesus is predicting the end to that whole period of tribulation of distress in verses 4 through 22, including the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but also included a number of other events that would characterize the entire period of history leading up to the coming of Christ, however long that lasted.

But again, Jesus is not interested in predicting how long or when he'll come back; he only predicts that he will, and that should make a difference in the lives of his readers and his disciples. So, nothing that Jesus says in this section should lead us to conclude that he was mistaken, that he made a prediction that never came about, and, therefore, he was wrong. I want to end this section by looking at two well-known parables that provide, I think, an interesting perspective on what's going on, but a perspective that I think we usually miss.

The two parables I have in mind are the one at the very end of Matthew 24 and then the first parable at the end of Matthew 25. As we said, after the end of chapter 24 and all the way through chapter 25, Jesus reverts to parables, showing us his main concern. It's not a prediction, eschatological prediction.

He's not predicting a course of events, when he'll come back, or how to read signs. His main concern is embodied in the parables where he's challenging his readers to be awake, to be vigilant, to live responsibly and to be good stewards of what God has given them, to live life responsibly, to live holy lives in obedience to Christ in light of the fact and until Christ returns. The first parable that I want to look at is at the very end of Matthew 24.

It's the parable of the watchful servant. And here it is. Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has put in charge of his household to give them food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes.

And to give you a little bit of background, the reference here is probably to a wealthy landowner, a wealthy steward who owns a lot of property, puts servants in charge, and would often travel and go away on business and leave his estate belongings within the care of his stewards or his servants. And now he comes back to find out whether they have taken care of what he has entrusted them with. But blessed is that servant whom the master finds faithful or doing his job when he comes.

Truly, I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says in his heart, my master is delayed, and he starts to beat his fellow

servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, that servant's master will come on a day he does not expect him and an hour when he does not know. He will cut him to pieces and assign his place to the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A kind of an image of eternal punishment. Now, what I want you to notice is going on here is the issue of the steward; the master thought his steward was going to stay away, and the steward thought, my master is going to stay away for a long time. And so he begins to do what he wants.

He wastes his money, and he lives in a way that he shouldn't. The problem in the parable is stated in verse 50, that the servant's master will come on a day he does not expect, and an hour he does not know, which reflects the saying back in verse 34, I'm sorry verse 36. Now concerning that day and hour, no one knows, neither the angels nor the son except the father alone.

Now, this parable is meant to illustrate that. The problem here is the master came back sooner than the steward thought. The steward thought he was going to be delayed, and he had all kinds of time.

The problem is that the master came back sooner than he expected. Contrast that with the next parable, the parable of the 10 maidens in chapter 25. I won't read this, but you know the story there.

It's a parable of 10 maidens. The context is a first-century wedding, and the maidens are waiting for the bridegroom to come, at which point I think they escort him. They're waiting for the bridegroom to arrive, and there are 10 of them.

It says five are foolish, five of the maidens are foolish, kind of the wedding attendants. Five of them are wise. And what made them wise or foolish is five of them. The five foolish did not have enough oil to last much beyond a very short time.

The five that were wise brought other oil to keep their lamps burning for a long period of time. And the problem is, in verse 6 it says, in the middle of the night there came a shout, probably from a messenger, here's the groom, come out to meet him. Then they all went out, and the problem was that the groom was delayed.

The groom did not come back when they thought. He did not come back as soon as they thought, and he delayed. The five foolish were not prepared for a delay, the five wise were.

So, do you see the difference between the two parables? The first parable is about the problem of the master coming back sooner than he thought. The steward



thought that he had all kinds of time to get things together, but the master came back sooner. In this one, the problem is the opposite.

They thought the bridegroom would come right away, but he delayed longer than they had thought. So you have two perspectives. Both of these parables are teaching us about the coming of Christ.

Parable number one, Matthew 24, states that we need to be prepared because Christ might come back sooner than we think. But chapter 25 turns right around and says, but don't think that he'll come back too soon. Christ might delay longer than we think.

The point is that you need to be prepared for both. The disciples need to be prepared in case Christ comes back sooner than they think, even in their lifetime. Lest they think they have all kinds of time, they need to be ready in case Christ comes right away.

But they also need to be prepared for a delay. Christ might not come back as soon as they think. He might delay.

This all fits Jesus' saying, and no one knows the day or the hour, not even the Son of Man except the Father in heaven alone. So, since no one knows, we don't know if it's going to be sooner than we think. We don't know if it's going to take longer than we think.

There's going to be more of a delay. We have to be prepared for either situation. The rest of Matthew 25, the rest of the parables, including that well-known parable The sheep and the goats at the very end of chapter 25, are all instructing us on what it means to live in light of the soon return of Christ or the possibility of delay.

So even in Jesus' parables, Jesus' parables say just the opposite, that Jesus predicted the end and was wrong. No, Jesus told a parable where he thought there might be a period of delay, too, unless somebody wants to attribute that to the later church and not to Jesus, which I think is incorrect. I think all these parables were spoken by Jesus.

Jesus is also making room for delay. Yes, Jesus could come back soon, within the lifetime of his disciples, and he expected them to grasp that in chapter 24, and that Jesus could come back after these things take place. But he also allows for delay, that lest the disciples think Jesus necessarily will come back in their lifetime, Jesus reminds them, but there could be some delay.

And God's people must be vigilant and must be prepared for either scenario. So once again, nothing in chapters 24 and 25 that Jesus says should lead us to conclude that

Jesus predicted the end and was, therefore, mistaken.

This is Dr. David Matthewson in his teaching on the question, Where Is His Coming?  
Session 2, Delay of the Parousia in Jesus' Teaching.